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CAN IT BE DENIED?

FLEEING TO THE PAST

The Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, who has had such an immense influence upon the Protestantism of this generation was in his early days a theological Liberal. The first great war made a tremendous impact upon him and he found his particular Liberalism not suited to the emotional problems he had to solve. He had two alternatives before him; he either had to choose to go forward to Unitarianism — as he understood it — or backwards to the ancient Protestantism with its belief in the total depravity of man, and, as a means of salvation, a belief in the infallibility of the Bible. Karl Barth chose the latter alternative.

This choice should not be treated lightly. It was made by a remarkable man who, like other men, have to find an answer to the riddle of life. It seemed to be more certain that man was an awful sinner rather than an angel in disguise. Optimistic Liberalism had tended to look upon man as — if not an angel, then one in the making. Much has happened to mar this faith during the past thirty years. It seemed more emotionally true to Barth to regard man as a sinner: — and if a sinner, in what way could he be saved? For in religion no man convinced of sin can rest comfortably in his sinning. He provided the answer in what he called the Word of God, in effect the infallibility of the Bible. A sinner could create nothing that is true; always his sin would rest upon him and all his works. He could only find salvation outside himself, and Barth found this in an absolutely God-created medium — the Word. This was an authority that could do all that a religious man asked of it.

MEN ESCAPING FROM THEMSELVES

The alternatives that Barth faced are presented to many men today. The optimistic Liberalism of this generation seems to have failed. It appears not to answer the facts of the situation — the situation of life. And many men like Barth have returned to the past; or rather the past furbished up with certain current mythological attitudes, for it is not possible for a modern to turn himself completely into the man of a few centuries ago. It is a wonderful release for many men to escape from the burden of themselves into an authority not of themselves. Hence the almost passionate avowal of dogmatic Protestantism and dogmatic Catholicism made by many men, who, in their like a generation ago, would not have dreamed of running to an emotional authoritarianism. It seems to answer the facts of their situation, and they fling up their hands, and in their respective ways cry, Hallelujah! Incidentally, how much of decent Communism runs in the same direction?

BUT THERE IS A DIFFICULTY

But there is one grim, or noble, difficulty — according as to how one reflects — in this solution. Most obviously and without the possibility of denial, the Bible and the Church were man-created. If the Bible reveals the way of God with man — and it does — then that revelation was made through the passionate striving of men: through men whose like is "continued even to this

day". If the Church, in spite of all its evils, bears the mark of God — and it does — then that mark has been cut into the life of history by men who sought with passion the presence of God.

Man as a sinner can never escape from man as a saint. Or, perhaps, as it should be said today, man the God-created, whole personality can no more escape from the hand of God laid upon him in his wholeness than he can escape from the despair of non-fulfilment in his own life. Both are true, the hand of God and the despair, and they exist in the whole man.

GOING WITH THE LIGHT

Why run away from this fact? It is the creative abiding fact of history. It has brought man out of the dust, crawling on all fours, to the possibility of living continuously with the thought of infinity outside and within himself. He is still man, doomed to fall or rise; but that has ever been his condition, and in spite of all the moaning and groaning never less present in the past than it is today. If evil and ignorance only are needed to serve God, then how incalculably wretched and false is the state of man; if goodness and wisdom are needed, then how glorious his opportunity. To deny that opportunity is to deny the light that comes flooding into the mind and conscience. Unitarianism will not turn backwards; it will go forward with the light.

MODERNISTS AND UNITARIANS

by G. Randall Jones

A friend of mine has been much impressed by some of the literature of the Modern Churchmen's Union. He finds that the ideas and ideals cherished by these Modernists are very similar to his own. In his enthusiasm at this discovery, he writes to me to ask whether Unitarians ought not to give full support to the Modern Churchmen's Union. He suggests that "the Unitarian Fellowship, while keeping its present organisation going, might make a better contribution to the spread of 'Christianity in its simplest and most intelligible form' by putting all its weight into the Modern Churchmen's Union instead of concentrating on trying to increase its own influence". As there may be others who are thinking along those lines, I venture a few comments.

Unitarianism is the religion which, as Charles Dickens said, "has sympathy with men of every creed and ventures to find fault with none". That is our aim; perhaps we don't always live up to it, but that is what we aim at. Therefore, of course, we would gladly co-operate with men of every creed, so far as they will allow us to do so. More especially, we would like to co-operate with those whose ideas and ideals are closely akin to our own. On many points it seems that the ideas and ideals of the Modernists are akin to ours. But many Unitarians, such as myself, fear that any explicit co-operation between Unitarians and Modernists would be an embarrassment to the Modernists. If this is not so, it is for them to say so. We cannot be blind to the fact that the charge most commonly levelled at the Modernists by their fellow-Churchmen is that they, the Modernists, are Unitarians, or, at least, drifting in the direction of Unitarianism. This charge is repudiated by the Modernists.

They are quite justified in repudiating it. To ignore the difference between Modernists and Unitarians, in the name of so-called Christian charity, is to make confusion worse confounded. The Unitarian basis of religious fellowship is unique, or almost unique — it is based on a common feeling, a common purpose, a common aspiration, but not on a common creed, or on anything that can be put into a precise form of words. Unitarians have no creeds as tests of religious fellowship. At the moment I am not defending this non-creedal basis of fellowship. I am simply stating what the basis is.

The Modernist, no less than the Roman Catholic, does not accept the non-creedal basis. The difference between the Roman Catholic and the Modernist is this: the Roman Catholic wants to keep the creeds as they are, or perhaps add some new dogmas to them; the Modernist

wants to revise them, so as to bring them more into touch with modern thought. On this level of argument, I have considerable sympathy with the Roman Catholic contention that, whatever may be the case in matters of scientific research, we have no assurance that "modern" thought is superior to "ancient" thought when the matter at issue is one of spiritual reality.

Moreover, in the interim period, whilst the creeds are undergoing revision, the Modernist is in a position of grave difficulty. In order that he may work from the "inside" for the revision of the creeds, he must first accept the creeds, and repeat them as they stand, though he is allowed wide latitude in the way he interprets them. He can explain the sense in which he interprets them, but his interpretation seems to many people to be strained, artificial, and far-fetched. It does not carry conviction. That is the Modernist's difficulty.

I am quite sure that the Modernists do not wish to encourage misunderstanding. They are men of sensitive conscience, and any Unitarian who supposes that they play tricks with conscience in order to enjoy the privileges of the communion of the Established Church has not begun to understand them. They see, quite correctly, that spiritual truths must be spiritually discerned; that symbolic or non-literal language is the only language sufficiently flexible and with sufficient emotional and aesthetic appeal, to convey to mortal minds hints of the realities which transcend space and time and gravitation. They have, too, a strong sense of the value of tradition. The trouble is that they have not succeeded in convincing people that the creeds can bear the interpretation which the Modernist mind would place upon them.

WHY NOT BOTH ?

by John Rowland

One of the most widely spread beliefs of the early part of this century (a belief still held in many quarters) was that there was a necessary contradiction between the scientific and the religious point of view. Those who held this belief were inclined to say that religious and scientific knowledge were so different that it was almost absurd to use the same word for them both. In fact, the more irreligious scientists (particularly those of strictly Marxist views) have taken the attitude that one of the jobs of science is to oppose religion, and to show beyond all doubt that theology is mere word-spinning and self-deception.

It is useless to deny that this attitude of mind still has many supporters. The foolishness of its basic premises are obvious to all who have any understanding of theology; yet the man-in-the-street, thinking of all the Churches as old-fashioned and useless institutions, has often accepted the philosophical ideas of the scientists at a time when many of the scientists themselves were abandoning them.

For that reason such a book as Miss Gertrude Quinton's Scientific and Religious Knowledge (S.C.M. Press, 8s 6d) deserves a very wide public. Miss Quinton is Divinity Mistress at a large grammar school and her book has grown largely out of teaching to her sixth-formers, and answering the questions that, in this age of science, they almost invariably raise. The volume suffers slightly from the fact that she is not a scientist, and so has to accept her scientific information at second-hand. This is, of course, a comparatively minor matter; nonetheless it tends to put off the reader with a scientific background. And it is a pity, because the main point which Miss Quinton is trying to make (and on the whole succeeding in making) is of such importance that it should not be neglected.

That point is that the scientific view of life necessarily involves the belief in a universe which works according to rule. And a universe which works according to rule must, to any logical mind, involve a belief in some kind of Ruler. If, in other words, we find

that there is, across a piece of open country, a trail of pieces of paper, we do not assume that those pieces of paper have been blown there at random by the wind; we assume that there has been a paper-chase, and that some schoolboy has laid those pieces of paper down in order that his fellows may follow. Similarly, when we find that there are certain aspects of the physical universe which point to a uniformity of aim, we should, if we are logical, assume that these are not accidental, but are the result of a Person who has planned the universe in that particular way.

What I have written here is, inevitably, a simplification of Miss Quinton's general line of argument.

Since Dr. Joad wrote, in 1942, *God and Evil*, that stimulating discussion of the dilemma of the intellectual faced with the facts of religion, there have been many attempts to unite scientific and religious knowledge in one synthesis. Miss Quinton's is, I think, the most successful up to date. The fact is that we have scientific knowledge on the one hand; we have religious knowledge on the other. The question we have to answer (and I think it can be answered only in one way) is this: Why not accept both kinds of knowledge as of parallel and complementary importance?

NEWS REVIEW

In common with other London periodicals, we are again in difficulties this week owing to the printing dispute, and the news that has come to us must be summarised. First of all, there are the invitations from Manchester and Bristol for students going up to the Universities to worship at Cross Street Chapel, for Manchester, and Lewins Mead Meeting and the Oakfield Road Church, Clifton, for Bristol. The ministers of each of these churches extend to students a hearty welcome.

Two interesting news items are sent to us from provincial papers. The first comes from Kent. It reads as follows: "While in Northiam the other day I came across the tiny tree-enshrouded Unitarian Chapel. A notice board on the door said, 'Come in and rest', so I lifted up the latch and went inside.

"Imagine my surprise when I found an avenue of flowers inside leading up to the central aisle to the preacher's stand at the top. Here there were more flowers, and looking back to the entrance, I found more. The little house of God was as clean as a new pin and an oasis from the roar of the London-bound traffic, which rushes through Northiam all day."

The notice concluded by inviting other people to go and see for themselves. How cheered the congregation at Northiam must have been to read that notice.

We can interpolate here news received from the secretary of the Buxton Church. He writes to say that their church is opened every day from 9 a.m. to dusk, and there is plenty of evidence to show it is used. The church garden has been turned from a wilderness into a thing of beauty. The secretary adds a tribute to the minister, Dr. Dyer, who is now leaving after five and a half years' service.

The Annual Fellowship Week-end Celebrations at the Church of the Divine Unity, Newcastle on Tyne, were marked by all their customary vigour and goodwill, and had lost nothing with the passing of the years. Sunday, Oct. 1 saw the commencement of Mr. Barnes's 32nd year as the minister, and few congregations can have had greater cause for rejoicing and thankfulness than this one, for few can have been served with greater devotion and distinction. The congregation rejoices and count themselves fortunate to have with them still so true and constant a pastor and friend.

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